

The Land of the Altruists



and other writings by John Beverley Robinson

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Introduction

John Beverley Robinson was one of a small, iconoclastic band who pioneered conscious egoism at the turn of the 19th century and an important figure in American individualist anarchism, one who continued in an active role in the United States long after Benjamin Tucker ceased publishing his journal *Liberty* in 1908 (an event which threatened to nullify this philosophical tendency completely). Along with Tucker, John Henry Mackay and others, Robinson rejected “natural rights” as fictitious and embraced the egoism of Max Stirner and (unfortunately) the mutualism of Proudhon, whose *General Idea of the Revolution in the 19th Century* he translated into English for the first time (this was Proudhon’s “best book”, in Tucker’s opinion). Robinson was also the author of *The Economics of Liberty*, inspired by Proudhon’s ideas (published by Herman Kuehn in 1916 in Minneapolis) and the detailed *Rebuilding The World: An Outline of the Principles of Anarchism* (a historically interesting and intellectually strong work which will, however, not be republished by *Enemy Combatant*, as it’s far too utopian for our tastes).

Robinson’s passion for Proudhon is typical of the American individualist anarchists of his period, but we’re far more interested in him as an exponent of the uncompromising egoism of Max Stirner and so, we’ve carefully sifted through his known literary output and selected what we consider to be his most devastating frontal attacks on dominant modes of cultural thought. Egoism is an essay that’s seen a revival in recent years, and for good reason: It first appeared in the mimeographed individualist anarchist review *Instead of a Magazine* in 1915 and was reprinted repeatedly thereafter (in *Reedy’s Mirror* in 1915, *Freedom* in 1923, *The Road to Freedom* in 1929, and *Freedom Through Anarchism* in 1946), and remains an invaluable short introduction to this philosophical tradition. *The Land of the Altruists* is a playful and satiric egoist parable about pointless self-sacrifice that Robinson contributed to the August 10th, 1895 issue of *Liberty* (a piece that has most definitely withstood the test of time), while *The Abolition of Marriage* is (on a lesser note) a competent and concise egoist examination of loving relationships. James J. Martin, author of *Men Against The State* (probably the definitive study of American individualist anarchism), referred to the next piece, *The Limits of Governmental Interference*, as “the best of all summaries of egoism applied to anarchism” and we more or less share his opinion, although the Proudhonian obsession with economics rears its dismal head towards the end of the essay. Finally, we end this collection with *The Perfect Anarchist*, a letter Robinson

wrote towards the end of his life to a pro-war journal that shows how principled some of our rebel predecessors were (in contrast to the high-turnover rate of contemporary anarchists). Robinson, though writing from an earlier era, is far from antiquated or irrelevant, and we hope the reprinting of his spirited writing will serve as a means of introducing a wider readership to this pungent, provocative, and humorous advocate of anarchy (and help stimulate more modern developments in individualist thought).

Egoism

There is no word more generally misinterpreted than the word egoism, in its modern sense. In the first place, it is supposed to mean devotion to self-interest, without regard to the interest of others. It is thus opposed to altruism—devotion to others and sacrifice of self. This interpretation is due to the use of the word thus antithetically by Herbert Spencer.

Again, it is identified with hedonism or eudaimonism, or epicureanism, philosophies that teach that the attainment of pleasure or happiness or advantage, whichever you may choose to phrase it, is the rule of life.

Modern egoism, as propounded by Stirner and Nietzsche, and expounded by Ibsen, Shaw, and others, is all these; but it is more. It is the realization by the individual that he is an individual; that, as far as he is concerned, he is the only individual. For each one of us stands alone in the midst of a universe. He is surrounded by sights and sounds which he interprets as exterior to himself, although all he knows of them are the impressions on his retina and ear drums and other organs of sense. The universe for him is measured by these sensations; they are, for him, the universe. Some of them he interprets as denoting other individuals, whom he conceives as more or less like himself. But none of these is himself. He stands apart. His consciousness, and the desires and gratifications that enter into it, is a thing unique; no other can enter into it.

However near and dear to you may be your wife, children, friends, they are not you; they are outside you. You are forever alone. Your thoughts and emotions are yours alone. There is no other who experiences your thoughts or your feelings.

No doubt it gives you pleasure when others think as you do, and inform you of it through language; or when others enjoy the same things that you do. Moreover, quite apart from their enjoying the same things that you enjoy, it gives you pleasure to see them enjoy themselves in any way. Such gratification to the individual is the pleasure of sympathy, one of the most acute pleasures possible for most people.

According to your sympathy, you will take pleasure in your own happiness

or in the happiness of other people; but it is always your own happiness you seek. The most profound egoist may be the most complete altruist; but he knows that his altruism is, at bottom, nothing but self-indulgence.

But egoism is more than this. It is the realization by the individual that he is above all institutions and all formulas; that they exist only so far as he chooses to make them his own by accepting them.

When you see clearly that you are the measure of the universe, that everything that exists, exists for you only so far as it is reflected in your own consciousness, you become a new man; you see everything by a new light; you stand on a height and feel the fresh air blowing on your face; and find new strength and glory in it.

Whatever gods you worship, you realize that they are your gods, the product of your own mind, terrible or amiable, as you may choose to depict them. You hold them in your hand, and play with them, as a child with its paper dolls; for you have learned not to fear them, that they are but the “imagination of your heart.”

All the ideals which men generally think are realities, you have learned to see through; you have learned that they are your ideals. Whether you have originated them, which is unlikely, or have accepted somebody else's ideals, makes no difference. They are your ideals just so far as you accept them. The priest is reverend only so far as you reverence him. If you cease to reverence him, he is no longer reverend for you. You have power to make and unmake priests as easily as you can make and unmake gods. You are the one of whom the poet tells, who stands, unmoved, though the universe falls in fragments about you.

And all the other ideals by which men are moved, to which men are enslaved, for which men afflict themselves, have no power over you; you are no longer afraid of them, for you know them to be your own ideals, made in your own mind, for your own pleasure, to be changed or ignored, just as you choose to change or ignore them. They are your own little pets, to be played with, not to be feared.

“The State” or “The Government” is idealized by the many as a thing above them, to be revered and feared. They call it “My Country,” and if you utter the magic words, they will rush to kill their friends, whom they would not injure by so much as a pin scratch, if they were not intoxicated and blinded by their ideal. Most men are deprived of their reason under the influence of their ideals. Moved by the ideal of “religion” or “patriotism” or “morality,” they fly at each others’ throats—they, who are otherwise often the gentlest of men! But their ideals are for them like the “fixed ideas” of lunatics. They

become irrational and irresponsible under the influence of their ideals. They will not only destroy others, but they will quite sink their own interests, and rush madly to destroy themselves as a sacrifice to the all-devouring ideal. Curious, is it not, to one who looks on with a philosophical mind?

But the egoist has no ideals, for the knowledge that his ideals are only his ideals, frees him from their domination. He acts for his own interest, not for the interest of ideals. He will neither hang a man nor whip a child in the interest of "morality," if it is disagreeable to him to do so.

He has no reverence for "The State." He knows that "The Government" is but a set of men, mostly as big fools as he is himself, many of them bigger. If the State does things that benefit him, he will support it; if it attacks him and encroaches on his liberty, he will evade it by any means in his power, if he is not strong enough to withstand it. He is a man without a country. "The Flag," that most men adore, as men always adore symbols, worshipping the symbol more than the principle it is supposed to set forth, is for the egoist but a rather inharmonious piece of patch-work; and anybody may walk on it or spit on it if they will, without exciting his emotion any more than if it were a tarpaulin that they walked upon or spat upon. The principles that it symbolizes, he will maintain as far as it seems to his advantage to maintain them; but if the principles require him to kill people or be killed himself, you will have to demonstrate to him just what benefit he will gain by killing or being killed, before you can persuade him to uphold them.

When the judge enters court in this toggery (judges and ministers and professors know the value of toggery in impressing the populace) the egoist is unterrified. He has not even any respect for "The Law." If the law happens to be to his advantage, he will avail himself of it; if it invades his liberty he will transgress it as far as he thinks it wise to do so. But he has no regard for it as a thing supernal. It is to him the clumsy creation of them who still "sit in darkness."

Nor does he bow the knee to Morality--Sacred Morality! Some of its precepts he may accept, if he chooses to do so; but you cannot scare him off by telling him it is not "right." He usually prefers not to kill or steal; but if he must kill or steal to save himself, he will do it with a good heart, and without any qualms of "conscience." And "morality" will never persuade him to injure others when it is of no advantage to himself. He will not be found among a band of "white caps," flogging and burning poor devils, because their actions do not conform to the dictates of "morality," though they have injured none by such actions; nor will he have any hand in persecuting helpless girls, and throwing them out into the street, when he has received no ill at their hands.

To his friends--to those who deserve the truth from him--he will tell truth;

but you cannot force the truth from him because he is "afraid to tell a lie." He has no fear, not even of perjury, for he knows that oaths are but devices to enslave the mind by an appeal to supernatural fears.

And for all the other small, tenuous ideals, with which we have fettered our minds and to which we have shrunk our petty lives; they are for the egoist as though they were not.

"Filial love and respect" he will give to his parents if they have earned it by deserving it. If they have beaten him in infancy, and scorned him in childhood, and domineered over him in maturity, he may possibly love them in spite of maltreatment; but if they have alienated his affection, they will not reawaken it by an appeal to "duty."

In brief, egoism in its modern interpretation, is the antithesis, not of altruism, but of idealism. The ordinary man—the idealist—subordinates his interests to the interests of his ideals, and usually suffers for it. The egoist is fooled by no ideals: he discards them or uses them, as may suit his own interest. If he likes to be altruistic, he will sacrifice himself for others; but only because he likes to do so; he demands no gratitude nor glory in return.

John Beverley Robinson "Egoism," *Freedom* 38, no. 414 (January 1924): 3.

The Land of the Altruists: A Parable for the Infant Class

If you start from the South Pole and tail due north, you will come to a wonderful country inhabited by the people called Altruists.

They are called so because they prefer other people's happiness to their own.

They are a very industrious, hard-working, uncomplaining people, forever toiling from daylight till dark, making all kinds of useful and luxurious things; yet so unwilling are they to enjoy the fruits of their labor, too anxious for somebody else to be happy at their expense, that they have made this very ingenious and complete arrangement to secure that result.

They have ordained that everybody who has produced a thousand dollars' worth of goods shall receive from the rest of the community sixty dollars a year; he who has made or obtained in any way ten thousand dollars' worth shall receive six hundred dollars a year ; and so on in proportion.

Now, it is easily seen that, as the people to whom these stipends are paid are at liberty to go on, working and making enough to live on, they are able to lay by the amounts paid to them by the community. After a while these amounts become so large that they need not work at all, for all the rest of the

Altruitt community are pledged to support them, their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, not only till death, but forever.

Such sweet and unselfish dispositions have these Altruists.

There are getting to be a good many of these people who are supported by the Altruists.

Two or three million at a guess in every twenty or thirty million families do not work, but are paid because they have so much already. They are getting very bossy, too, these stipendiaries of the workers, and begin to hold themselves very loftily, and despise the unselfish workers as dirty, ignorant, low creatures, unmindful of the fact that it is only because the workers are Altruists that they enjoy providing luxuries for others rather than for themselves.

It is getting to be rather hard scratching, too, for the workers, Altruists though they be, who enjoy hunger and suffering; for to the objects of their care, the supported class, they have given, not only all the houses and furniture, and all but a little of the butter and meat and bread, but the very land itself, so that now, when the Altruist workers want to work still harder and to cultivate more land to support the rapidly growing numbers of the Aristocrats, they find themselves forbidden by these very Aristocrats to use the land which they have given them.

Clearly a catastrophe must occur. Although the Altruists enjoy starving as long as they have the pleasure of seeing the Aristocrats, as they call those whom they support, have plenty, there is a physical limit to the process of starvation, and, when the Altruists begin to diminish in number, the Aristocrats must also dwindle.

What the outcome will be no man can prophesy—a relapse into slavery at least, which the Altruists would no doubt enjoy even more than their present arrangements; but there is a chance that their natures may change: they may become Egoists, and no longer take pleasure in giving to those who give nothing in return. Then there will be no Aristocrats, and everybody who is not an Altruist will have a much better time.

John Beverley Robinson in *Liberty*

The Abolition of Marriage

What is marriage?

Is it the happy association of a man and a woman, suited to each other in body and in mind, in tastes and in sentiments, by harmony or by contrast,

rejoicing each in the mere presence of the other, moved each by the mere sound of the voice of the other; with children, to whom they rather acknowledge themselves under obligations, for the softening and expanding influence of childhood (in babyhood, charming toys, the bringers of hope in childhood, in maturity companions) than assert harsh authority upon the ground of obligations conferred upon them, is this marriage?

By no means. This is not marriage. This is love. No marriage is necessary for such sweet involvements.

Marriage is not the happy and voluntary living together of men and women.

Marriage is a club. Now I have got you; if you try to get away, I will club you. That is what marriage is. And anyone can see its endearing influence.

Marriage is the privilege conferred by law, which is in the end by force, by which one person holds the person or the property of another against their will.

Theoretically each partner by marriage is endowed with claims upon both the person and property of the other. In practice usually it is the person of the wife that the man is after, and the property of the husband that the woman is after. When they get married, the woman exchanges her right to dispose of her body as she pleases for the substantial benefit of cash, either as support or otherwise. (By otherwise I mean, for instance, alimony).

When I denounce marriage, I have no objection to anybody living happily together. I only say that the possession of a club is not conducive to happiness.

If my wife wants to leave me, the only possible right that I have to retain her is the right of love. I absolutely deny that I have any right to shoot her or to shoot the man that she prefers to me, or to imprison her or in any way coerce her.

More than that; I really should not care to coerce her. The companionship of one we love is worthless when it is forced. Who would think of inviting a friend to go a-fishing, and threaten him with imprisonment if he should change his mind? Would the fishing excursion be much fun if one went under compulsion?

The result of the abolition of compulsion in marriage would soon be that only happy unions could exist. If a man were cruel (and many men are cruel without throwing dishes at their wives), the woman could simply leave him without asking permission of anybody.

It is not possible, if people ever loved each other that they would leave each other lightly. The flavor of friendship grows with age like wine. And if marriage now is not based on friendship, under liberty it could not be based upon anything else. Now a woman usually catches a man by his passion, and there could be no more uncertain and fleeting foundation for a permanent union. When a marriage is happy now-a-days it is because friendship has grown after marriage.

But if a woman had no power to compel her husband to support her, she would be very sure first that his love for her was a deep affection. The rapidly growing equality of the sexes will make intimate friendship more and more possible. In the future the marriage of hearts will come first rather than afterwards, or not at all, as now...

It is commonly felt that all who urge the abolition of marriage particularly wish to be free themselves to lead a reckless life sexually. In my opinion it is chiefly those who are happily married who have reason to desire the abolition of marriage. I say this because anybody who wants to lead a loose life can easily do so. They must be a little careful, cultivate their powers of deceit and hypocrisy, and loudly condemn anybody who suggests that marriage is not all it is supposed to be.

While for those who love, the fact of possessing any power of coercion continually comes up as a little drop of bitterness. She only married me to get taken care of. He only married me from passion. Such feelings at moments arise. Without marriage they could not arise. Each would know that, however love might seem to be lacking, it could but exist; doubt would be impossible; for, with the departure of love (and by love I do not mean merely sexual desire) association would not be maintained...

If I were to speak merely of the abolition of marriage as a desirable thing only, it need have little weight with anybody. What I really feel, and what I really urge, and what must have weight with everybody, is that the abolition of marriage (not the happy living together, but the ceremony, the legalization) is really inevitable...

Notice how many women are being forced to depend upon themselves for support. For each woman thus forced to support herself the wages of men are in proportion reduced.

The tendency is toward an equalization of men's and women's wages, making it more and more difficult for a man to support a woman, and for a woman to find a man who can support her.... When men and women shall be equal financially, is it probable that marriage will survive? With no need on the part of the woman for support, will she give any man power to control

her? Will she vow life-long obedience to any man? Would it be especially virtuous that she could vow life-long obedience to any man?

It will not be long before we shall all of us see the absurdity of demanding that she should place her body for life in the power of any man. We shall see the absurdity of the feeling that any ceremony can add sanctity to the holiness of nature. We shall see the absurdity of the prejudice that a pledge of temporary association and aid for mutual pleasure in begetting and rearing children is necessarily morally abominable, while a permanent pledge to the same effect is necessarily laudable.

We shall see too that one person's taste does not constitute a rule for all men. That, if I admire monogamy, it is no reason why I should abhor those who prefer polygamy or polyandry. We shall see that good faith and honor and uprightness are quite as possible where men exercise no compulsion upon each other in sexual matters as where they do; that, in fact, as for the absolute slave, faith and honor are impossible, so it is only for the entirely free that perfect faith and perfect honor and perfect virtue are possible.

John Beverley Robinson, "The Abolition of Marriage," *Liberty* 6 no 18 (July 20, 1889): 6-7.

The Limits of Governmental Interference

Before I can express any opinion upon the limits of governmental interference, I must explain to you my views upon what constitutes a government.

In doing so I shall place before you, to the best of my ability, what is commonly called the Anarchistic view.

It has been objected that each one who calls himself an Anarchist holds a different opinion from the next one who calls himself by the same name; and that consequently the name of Anarchism conveys no definite meanings. The assertion that there are wide differences among Anarchists is true: the inference that there is no coherent group of opinions corresponding to the name is, I think, mistaken.

At this time there are a dozen different sets of people who are thinking about the pressing questions of the day, - the Socialists, the Henry George men, the Ethical Culturists, the Christian Socialists, the Anarchists,- and in each of these there are sub-divisions. Take any branch you may, and you will scarcely find two members of it of entirely the same opinion. It is as true of any one of them as it is true of the Anarchists.

Indeed, in such a time of fervent thought, when the most marked intellectual feature of the day is the almost universal anticipation of impending

change, what could we expect among those who think at all but striking divergences of opinion? How could we expect that among Anarchists most of all there would not be strongly declared individual differences, being as they are undoubtedly the most advanced, whether they are the most correct in their conclusions or not?

Would not anything approaching unanimity mean fixity and death?

But it may be roughly said that, whatever their internal differences, all Anarchists think that progress and the attainment of economic comfort is possible without a relinquishment of liberty, while most other schools are of the opinion that meat is more than life and that prosperity must be purchased at the cost of some liberty.

No time need be spent upon theological questions. Theology has retired from the battle. It would be as becoming for a man to kick his grandmother as to revile theology nowadays. By sheer inertia the Churches still exist, as the train runs on with speed scarcely perceptibly slackened, after the locomotive is detached; but their warmth has cooled, the infernal fires that force them on are drawn, and all men can see that they are now but dead ashes.

What is the meaning of this retirement of theology? Few suspect the importance of its bearing upon practical affairs. It means more than the mere exchanging of church going for Coney Island on Sundays. It means more even than the final removal from man's life of a mass of hopes and dreams that have seemed to many the most important part of life. Beyond all that, it means that a new way of looking at things that must arise, to influence each most trivial action, and throw a new and different glory upon life.

Those who regret the fallings of the leaves, but have not yet learned to look forward to their coming again, despair as they see the breaking-up of the old beliefs. We are left without a moral standard, they explain.

How can men, left "without hope" in the world, find any rule of action by which they can regulate their conduct?

Their complaint is just. We are indeed left without a moral standard. To take its place there has developed the egoistic philosophy, the outcome of the utilitarian doctrine, and bearing much the same relation to it that Anarchism bears to Democracy.

"Do what you think is most to your interest" is the Egoistic principle.

Antagonistic as such a phrase sounds to the codes of the past, impossible as it seems that what we have been accustomed to call "lofty" or "noble" actions can spring from such a source, it will be found upon consideration that,

so far from forbidding a high ideal of conduct, a high ideal is possible upon no other basis.

To the Christian the notion that it can be directly profitable to be honest is a very painful nothing. His notion is that the directly profitable and pleasant course is the dishonest one; and that nobody would submit to the distasteful requirement of honest except with the reward hereafter in view in consideration of his self-denial in abstaining from dishonesty.

So with all other virtues and vices. The vices are esteemed by the ascetic code that is evanescent to be essentially pleasant; the virtues essentially painful. There is nothing for it, according to that code, but for us to bear with the discomforts attached to a virtuous life, lest a worse thing befall us in a hypothetical future existence.

The scientific view, on the other hand, is that virtue is virtue only because it is productive of happiness; and that vice is vice because it is productive of unhappiness. At the bottom, moreover, each one is unable to determine what is for the advantage or happiness of another; while each one knows, better than anybody else, what is for his own happiness. Therefore at the bottom each action must be judged by the individual, as to whether it is conducive to his own happiness, not as to whether it will make somebody else happy.

And this applies in its fullest force even to those actions commonly called altruistic, which give pleasure to the doer indirectly, although directly they may give pain to the doer and pleasure to somebody else.

A kind action preformed without any sense of gratification to the doer, loses its character as a kind action. If the other who is benefited even suspects that his benefactor is loath to do him the deed, his appreciation of it gives place to reluctance, or even to resentment.

Benevolence is hypocrisy, when prompted by any feeling but personal delight in benevolence.

Such, most briefly and inadequately sketched, is Egoism. Does it surprise you that I should connect such widely separated matters as the immediate economic distress, and such wide-drawn ethical formulas? That I should desire social progress from the elimination of the hell-fire theory? Just this connection I wish to accentuate. Just so intimately, in fact, are our every-day actions based upon our underneath philosophy.

"Do what seems to your advantage," says Egoism, "in fact, you cannot do otherwise."

Why then exhort people to do what they cannot help doing? Simply for

this reason, - that, although each always does what seems to him most to his advantage, there may be a wide variation in the accuracy of his estimate of what is most to his advantage.

It is to the development of the intellect as a guide to conduct that Science exhorts, not as in the past to an emotion subjection to cut-and-dried moral formulas.

Test your actions, not by formulas, but test both formulas and actions continually as you test other things, by observing whether they fulfill their purpose, whether they accord with other facts, whether they are just and true.

But, when once you are sure that a given course of action will conduce to your happiness, follow it.

If you are sure that you enjoy quarrelling and tumult among those about you, by all means bull and rage and tyrannize until, no matter how much pain others may suffer, you yourself have achieved happiness so far.

If, on the other hand, you enjoy a peaceful life, notice particularly that your bullying and so on directly diminishes your happiness. Perhaps you will find that you stir up a tumult, not because you like a tumult, but because you are urged by some old-fashioned talk of duty.

"It is for a man to be master in his own house." "Little children must do as they are told" "it is proper for servants to remember their station." These are the superstitious formulas to which we sacrifice our happiness. Science intervenes and says: "In giving precedence in a formula you commit an error of judgment. Let the formula go. If you want peace and quiet, do what is directly necessary to procure peace and quiet, and do not sacrifice your happiness to a superstition."

There are no such things as right and wrong; there are very certainly such things as good judgment and bad judgment. A man cannot be wicked, though he may be foolish. "Forsake the foolish and live." "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding."

Applying this principle to affairs political, Anarchists observe to main facts. First: That, for the procurement of happiness, freedom of action for each individual is indispensable.

So various are the tastes of men that each must be happy, if at all, in his own way. To be in a position to obtain happiness men must be independent, and men must be free.

Secondly, they observe that in all past times a large part of men's activities

have been unnecessary; having been directed, not toward gratifying their desires, but toward logically carrying out certain inaccurate inferences as to the sequences of phenomena which we commonly call superstitions.

Thus men, in all ages, have heavily taxed themselves, owing to a mistaken estimate of ability of certain men to predict, and by means of prayers and incantations, to control the future. So too, men still tax themselves heavily out of deference to a superstitious reverence for a creature of the imagination called the State – sometimes called our country, - and they do things detrimental to their welfare for what they call the honor of the country, lofty patriotism, and so forth.

Often, too, men sacrifice their happiness in the interest of what they call “morality,” as in all periods humane and kindly men have suffered their impulses to be quenched by an insane deference for the established bloodthirsty methods, from the Roman cross to the American gallows, justifying what they know is barbarous by the name of morality.

Seeing all this, Anarchists say: We will no longer acquiesce to this. As soon as possible entirely, and now to the extent of our abilities, we will do only what gives us happiness.

We demand the fullest liberty possible to exercise our faculties, and we are willing to concede the same liberty to others. We may object if anybody enjoys his Sunday by making such a racket as to disturb us; but we object, distinctly, because we do not like to be disturbed, not because it is Sunday. On any other day the same disturbance we would object to as much.

This view of it urges that for the attainment of happiness all must have entire liberty to do anything; but that where their liberties extinguishes the other. I have the right to aggress, but, if the society of men gives me more pleasure than Ishmael's life, I will abstain from aggression. That it is advisable that each should exercise all liberties, save such as limit the exercise of the liberties of others, is called the law of equal liberty, and is a simply formulated statement of the necessary relations of individuals in a perfect society, as derived from mechanical and biological data.

Nor need anybody stagger over the question of what constitutes aggression, although it is a frequent staggering point for the inquirer.

In the nature of things what constitutes aggression is a variable quantity. Each one must estimate whether it is not easier for him to put up with a given action on the part of another, rather than take the trouble to suppress it by force. The other must judge whether it is for his interest to abstain upon request, or to court forcible encounter. Upon the degree in which force and fighting are pleasurable occupations at any given stage of development, will

depend the solution.

Although Anarchism maintains the right of each individual to compel action upon the part of others by any means he may choose, it announces that as a matter of policy it is not advisable for anyone to compel any action from others, except in restraining of aggression upon their part. This may still seem too vague, but Anarchism goes a step farther.

In suppressing attacks, it says, we will do what we can ourselves, and we will invite others to aid us; we, however, pledge ourselves not to compel anybody to help us suppress an action of which he does not desire the suppression. This would appear to us aggression on our part – and we will not indulge in it.

Here we touch bottom.

The essence of government is that it permits no secession.

Men may long for the abolition of the political abuses of the present; - yet they are compelled to support them. Men may regard war as murder; yet they pay each his quota to support it.

Men may regard churches as deleterious in their influence and immoral in their teachings, - yet by the exemption of churches from taxation we are all assessed to support them.

And so on. The intelligent, the progressive, must retire until they can find a majority to agree with them.

Therefore it is that Anarchists abjure and denounce the system of compulsory taxation, which is the essence of government.

In denying compulsory taxation we deny government in any proper sense of the word.

A protective association, protection only for those who wish to pay for protection, and refraining from territorial dominion, is not a government.

It is its nature a government compels adhesion, forces financial support, where it is not yielded willingly, and is essentially, not a protective, but an aggressive association.

With a voluntary defensive association the Anarchists has no quarrel; as for the compulsory association, he looks forward to its speedy death, from natural causes.

So that we can at last answer the question to the limits of governmental

interference, by answering that when men are influenced by their reason rather than by their superstitions, they will not permit any interference at all with their actions by the organized system of aggression called government.

Observe, now, how directly the abolition of the governmental monster will conduce out happiness.

In the next place the currency will be free, permitting men to exchange their products to the best advantage.

These two freedoms alone mean much. They mean the end of rent and interest, the two most potent agents in the process which we see going on, the transferring of wealth from the pocket of the worker to that of the idler.

They mean the end of the commercial profits and dividends of all kings, which are but other forms of rent and interest.

Further than this, Anarchism means the cessation of all taxes save such as free people judge to be for their advantage to pay,—the total cessation of the present practice of bonding towns, not so much for the benefit of improvements as to afford another investment for those who are seeking more opportunities to profit without labor.

Anarchism means too, no indirect taxation, no secret filching of what the authorities dare not grasp openly, no robber import-duties, no spying Comstock and Sunday laws, no suppression, repression and perpetual compression of our energies.

Inequalities, truly; but such only as are inborn. Artificial inequalities no longer.

With such freedom to associate freely, with the burdens of compulsory association removed, Anarchists think that human society will evolve toward a more perfect and complete happiness, economically, physically, and intellectually, than any Fourier or Bellamy can predict, added to the priceless joys of liberty.

by John Beverley Robinson "The Limits of Governmental Interference," *Liberty* 8 no. 10 (August 15, 1891): 3-4.

The Perfect Anarchist

Editor of Reedy's Mirror:

Apropos of your "reflections" on conscription, may I mention one thing that the divine government cannot conscript—the mind of man.

Thus, I myself seceded from the United States and from all other governments long before the war began. I am not strong enough to make good my secession in practice, but I am held by force only, as a tributary, as a slave,—not as a willing associate.

After this confession of “disloyalty,” let any government just try to make me “loyal” by force. Let them require me to take any oath of allegiance: I will gladly say the words, for I have no mind to be a martyr; but I shall remain alien in spirit, antagonistic in thought, bent upon destroying the government that enslaves me as soon as I am able.

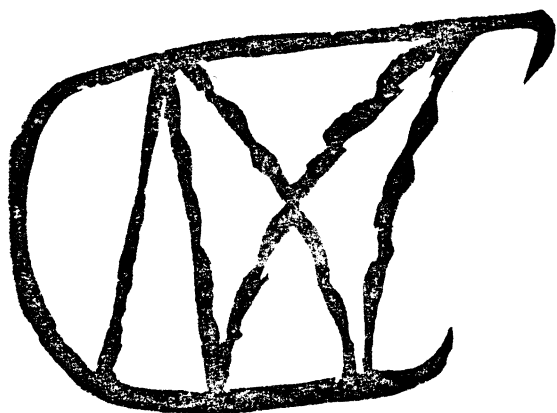
That is what governments get by conscripting bodies, when, with all their haughty omnipotence, they are unable to conscript minds. All the soldiers and policemen and jailors in the world cannot have the slightest control over my mind: it is stronger than they all.

If any government wants me as a willing member, it must offer its services, leaving me free to accept or decline as I may choose. But any government that does this ceases to be a government, and becomes a free society, such as the world has not yet seen, but such as is building now in Russia, where the heaven on earth that the future holds for us has begun to attain embodiment from its cloud forms of the past.

Ann Arbor, Mich., Jan. 15, 1918.

John Beverley Robinson, “The Perfect Anarchist,” *Reedy’s Mirror* 27, no. 4 (January 25, 1918): 53-54.

Enemy Combatant Publications



Valley Falls, Kansas